

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
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COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
ON BUSINESS PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL BOXING
MARCH 24, 1998

- I'm pleased to convene this morning's hearing on business practices in the professional boxing industry. Today's hearing is a continuation of the Committee's efforts to improve and reform practices in the industry, on behalf of the athletes and ticket-buying public which are its foundation.
- There is much work to be done. The notorious "red light district of sports" is perhaps the last major sporting industry in America where athletes face blatantly inequitable treatment due to the power and leverage exerted by its dominant business interests.
- The sport of boxing is one I have followed with great enthusiasm for over forty years. The business of boxing is one that I have viewed with concern and some sense of dismay for almost as long.
- In many ways, boxing is the last vestige of the owner - dominated sports leagues that existed decades ago in America, when athletes competed under circumstances virtually dictated to them by team owners.
- Professional boxing urgently warrants vigorous and effective **public and private oversight** - - much more so than any other sports industry in America. Yet it continues to trudge forward, -- varying from spectacular bouts to disturbing controversies -- in a vacuum of responsible leadership.
- That is a real loss for the millions of fans in America who love the sport as I do. Moreover, it undermines the dreams of the thousands of boxers who are determined with every ounce of their spirit to train, study, and fight their way out of usually impoverished circumstances.
- Of course, the general public is most familiar with the famous world champions who command incredible, multi-million dollar purses for a single fight. These champions may dominate the sports page when it comes to boxing, but they are not representative of the real nature of this sport. Most boxers make very little money, and have little control over their careers. There is no union, no pensions, and no support system once a boxer's career is over.
- 1997 clearly provided its full measure of new scandals and controversies in professional boxing, but it also saw the implementation of the first federal law to reform the sport in over thirty five years.

- The Professional Boxing Safety Act ensures that all boxing events in the U.S. are approved and supervised by state athletic officials; medical services and insurance are provided to all boxers; and a nationwide system of boxer identification and suspension enforcement has been established.
- However, *little appears to have changed regarding the business side of boxing*. Professional boxing remains a secretive and inexplicable mix of private deal-making, Byzantine ratings systems, and restrictive contracting practices. If professional boxing is ever to become the truly great and honorable sport it deserves to be, these areas must be reformed.
- I hope this morning's hearing will be a productive start on that path. I am interested in our witnesses' views on the fairness of current industry business practices to the athletes, as well as their overall effect on competition in the sport. The questionable operations of sanctioning organizations also need to be thoroughly examined.
- I want to thank each of the witnesses for their willingness to share their views and recommendations with us today. They are truly a distinguished and accomplished group, and I look forward to their comments on improving professional boxing in America.

*** *Closing comments on the boxers who used to sell candy on the street in Mexico* - -**

"That's what boxing represents at its best... Desire, endurance, and skill in the pursuit of opportunity."